

## Neoconservatives and Trotskyism

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In one of the first in-depth studies written about neoconservatism in the 1970s, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics* (1978), Peter Steinfels observed that it is impossible to understand the neoconservatives without understanding their history. Yet it is precisely the history of "the neocons" that is today being systematically distorted by paleoconservatives through the polemical campaign they are waging against leading neoconservative intellectuals and the foreign policy of the Bush administration.

As part of the two-decade old civil war within intellectual conservatism, paleoconservatives have forcefully asserted that neoconservatism is a descendant of American Trotskyism, and that neoconservatives continue to be influenced by the ideas of the exiled Soviet revolutionary in their view of foreign policy. In fact, in the period since the attacks of 9/11 the isolationist paleocons have made the "Trotskyist neocon" assertion one of their main weapons in the ongoing feud. Web sites such as The Center for Libertarian Studies' [LewRockwell.com](http://LewRockwell.com) and [Antiwar.com](http://Antiwar.com), and magazines such as Pat Buchanan's *American Conservative* and the Rockford Institute's *Chronicles*, have all featured articles focusing on the supposed link between the neocons and Leon Trotsky. The most extreme paleocons, who flirt dangerously with outright anti-Semitism, claim not only that neoconservatism is derivative of Trotskyism but that a "cabal of Jewish neocons" is manipulating US foreign policy and actually implementing Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution from the White House.

While paleoconservatives usually have little impact outside of intellectual circles, their "Trotskyist neocon" assertion has rapidly entered mainstream political discussion. To a large degree this is due to the efforts of anti-neocon liberal pundits, such as Michael Lind and William Pfaff, who popularized the neoconservative-as-Trotskyist theme both before and during the initial ground war in Iraq. The assertion is now so widely accepted that a writer as far removed from paleoconservatism (or anti-neocon liberalism) as *Vanity Fair's* Sam Tanenhaus can claim that, "...a belated species of Trotskyism has at last established itself in the White House." [1] Ostensibly serious discussions of neoconservative "Trotskyism" have also appeared in mainstream newspapers throughout the world, from Canada's *National Post* to Hong Kong's *Asia Times Online*. [2] And even as respected a foreign policy commentator as Dimitri K. Simes, co-publisher of *The National Interest*, has joined the "Trotskyist neocon" chorus, writing recently in Foreign Affairs that the neoconservatives' belief in "permanent worldwide revolution" owes more to the founder of the Bolshevik Red Army than to "America's forefathers". [3]

But despite its current popularity, the "Trotskyist neocon" assertion contributes nothing to our understanding of the origins, or nature, of neoconservatism. In fact quite the opposite. While it is based on elements of truth, the assertion for the most part consists of exaggerations, misrepresentations, and even outright falsifications whose end result is a thoroughly distorted view of the history of neoconservatism.

*The "Trotskyist roots" of neoconservatism*

As far back as the mid 1980s, paleoconservatives were caustically commenting on the supposed "Trotskyist roots" of the neoconservatives. At an infamously raucous debate between conservatives held at the Philadelphia Society in 1986, the paleoconservative historian Stephen J. Tonsor expressed dismay that former Marxists had come to play such a dominant role within conservatism, and quipped that had Trotsky not been assassinated he would no doubt be working for the Hoover Institute and writing articles for *Commentary*. [4] But it was not until the Gulf War of 1991 that the tale about neoconservatism's "Trotskyist roots" took the form in which we know it today. Within weeks of the war ending, Leon Hadar of the Cato Institute laid out the now widely accepted view in an article in the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*:

Among the major figures in the [neoconservative] movement were former Trotskyites who studied in the '30s and '40s at the then "poor man's Harvard," the City College of New York, a center for socialist activism. They included Irving Kristol, who in the 1950s launched an anti-Soviet CIA front, the International Congress for Cultural Freedom; Norman Podhoretz, the editor of the American Jewish Committee's monthly magazine *Commentary*, which he turned into a major neoconservative outlet; Podhoretz's wife, Midge Decter, the chairperson of the now-defunct Committee on the Free World; sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Bell; and Democratic Party pamphleteer Ben Wattenberg. [5]

The only problem with Hadar's account of neoconservatism's origins is that it is almost completely false. A simple check of biographical facts is enough to show that neither Norman Podhoretz nor Midge Decter attended CCNY in the 1930s or 40s, nor were they ever Marxists, let alone Trotskyists. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Bell

did attend CCNY in the late 1930s, but again neither was ever a Trotskyist. Glazer was a Left Socialist-Zionist, while Bell joined first the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) in the early 1930s, and then the ardently anti-communist Social Democratic Federation towards the end of the decade. For his part, Ben Wattenberg could hardly have attended CCNY in the 1930s or 40s since he was only born in 1933. He in fact did not attend CCNY at all, and was also never a Trotskyist. That leaves Irving Kristol as the only neoconservative among those mentioned by Hadar who was actually ever associated with Trotskyism -- and even that statement requires some qualification, as we will see below.

Outright fabrications aside, part of the reason behind the recurrent exaggeration of the "Trotskyist roots" of the neoconservatives lies in their frequent conflation with their parent grouping, the New York Intellectuals. As Alan Wald detailed in the most authoritative work on the impact of Trotskyism on the *New York Intellectuals*, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930's to the 1980's* (1987), many of the latter group did indeed pass through the different shades of Trotskyism available in the 1930s and 40s. From its different generations, one can list: Elliot Cohen, Sidney Hook (a brief and rather hesitant fellow traveler), Herbert Solow, Meyer Schapiro, Irving Howe, Saul Bellow, Harold Rosenberg, Dwight McDonald, and Clement Greenberg. There was also the infamous and fractious relationship between Trotsky and the founding editors of *Partisan Review*, William Phillips and Philip Rhav.

But the original neoconservative "brain trust" of the 1970s, as Alexander Bloom referred to it in his *Prodigal Sons* (1986), did not consist of any of the above New York intellectuals associated with Trotskyism. [6] Instead, it consisted of Kristol, Glazer, Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Norman Podhoretz -- and of *this* group, only two were briefly involved with Trotskyism: Kristol and Lipset. We can even add here the names of two less influential neoconservatives, although eminent scholars in their own rite: the historian and wife of Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, and the late political scientist Martin Diamond. The result is a grand total of four founding neoconservatives who passed through the ranks of Trotskyism. If one considers the list of first generation neoconservatives mentioned so far, which includes Bell, Glazer, Podhoretz and Decter, none of whom were Trotskyists, and then one adds such prominent early neoconservatives as Daniel Patrick Moynahan, James Q. Wilson, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Michael Novak, Robert Nisbet, Peter Berger, Hilton Kramer, and Walter Laqueur (and indeed one could go on); in other words if one looks at the first generation of neoconservatives *as a whole*, its so-called "Trotskyist roots" are shown to be much smaller and weaker than paleoconservatives have so insistently claimed.

More recently, as the "Trotskyist neocon" assertion has taken an increasingly prominent place in paleoconservative polemics, the trend has been away from inventing fictitious Trotskyist pasts for first generation neoconservatives, and towards using insinuations that leave the question of who was a Trotskyist deliberately unanswered. And understandably so, as there is more mileage to be had in implying that *all* of the original neoconservatives were former Trotskyists than by continuously recycling the names of the four that actually were.

A good example of this vagueness is provided by the prominent paleocon historian Paul Gottfried. In 1988, Gottfried co-authored *The Conservative Movement*, a serious and measured historical study of post-war intellectual conservatism that focused on the neo/paleo divide, and in which he made no mention of the supposed "Trotskyist roots" of neoconservatism. Yet subsequent to the Gulf War, Gottfried added an awkward and unsubstantiated claim about neoconservatism's "Trotskyist residues" to a revised 1993 edition of the book. [7] Today he polemically decries on the LewRockwell.com web site a conspicuously unnamed "...Trotskyist ascendancy over the conservative movement that began in the seventies and eighties" in which neoconservatives, themselves a "leftist revolutionary movement", have "...dragged Trotskyist themes, along with other baggage, into the conservative movement". [8] No names are provided by Gottfried for the simple reason that it would be impossible to "expose" the Trotskyist pasts of any original neoconservatives other than the four mentioned above -- whose numbers hardly merit the claim of a "Trotskyist ascendancy".

#### *The "Trotskyism" of Irving Kristol*

If the "Trotskyist roots" of neoconservatism have been greatly exaggerated, what about those of the first generation who *were* involved with Trotskyism? How much of an influence did Trotskyism have on their thinking? Presumably on this level a more credible case could be made for a real Trotskyist influence on neoconservatism. But it is precisely here that the complete lack of substance of the "Trotskyist neocon" assertion emerges, for there is nothing in any of the neoconservatives' vast political, sociological, or cultural writings that points to the remotest influence of Trotskyism. Instead, those propagating the assertion have been forced to rely only on whatever anecdotal evidence is available to make their case. Thus Irving Kristol, who wrote an autobiographical essay entitled "Memoirs of a Trotskyist" and has sprinkled mentions of his youthful political dalliances throughout his writings, is more often accused of still being influenced by Trotskyism than

Seymour Martin Lipset, who was also a Trotskyist but who has not made similar use of his own brief radical past.

For paleocon polemicists, it matters little that Kristol America's most prolific and high-profile intellectual little because as diligently reported by paleocon to write, and supposedly did so "with relish", that "I Trotskyite and I have not a single bitter memory". learned how to construct an argument by reading seriousness in the paleocon accusations is evident, it Trotskyist Irving Kristol was in his youth. And if very different picture emerges from the one that has extent by Kristol himself.

Kristol was involved in the late 1930s, still in his intellectuals that frequented the now-infamous fellow traveler of the small group of Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), known as the Young (YPSL-FI). While steeped in the world of hyper-SWP or YPSL-FI member -- and much less a full those seeking to exaggerate his Trotskyist American leader of the Trotskyists, once CCNYer Earl Raab for *not* joining the SWP. From YPSL's and fellow travelers such as Kristol and Raab because of their "lack of experience" and, more damningly, for their "petty bourgeois" backgrounds. [10]

Despite Cannon's scoldings, Kristol never did join the "official" Trotskyists of the SWP, but rather the heretical offshoot led by Max Shachtman, the Workers' Party (WP), in 1940. More importantly, Kristol belonged to a small intra-party faction inside the WP known as the "Shermanites" which was led by future Sociologist Philip Selznick, and also included Lipset, Himmelfarb, and Diamond, i.e. the only other neoconservatives to have been associated with Trotskyism. What is key here, and what for the most part has been overlooked, is that the Shermanites considered not only Stalinism but Bolshevism, which in their context meant *Trotskyism*, to be "... bureaucratic, totalitarian, and undemocratic". [11] Decisive to Kristol and the others' rejection of Marxism and Trotskyism was Robert Michels' *Political Parties*, which was introduced to the group by Selznick. [12] This "premature" anti-communism was so anathema to Shachtman that after Kristol and the tiny band of Shermanites resigned from the Workers' Party in 1941, a mere one year after they had joined, they were then *retroactively* expelled. The journal that Kristol and the Shermanites briefly published after their expulsion from the Workers Party, *Enquiry*, far from providing "conventional Marxist fare" as has been claimed by one scholar, in fact consisted mainly of substantive critiques of Marxism, Leninism, and Trotskyism, all the more noteworthy for the youthfulness of those making them. [13]

A more sober appraisal of the historical evidence shows that, contrary to the claims of the paleocons, and even some of his own writings, Irving Kristol's Trotskyism was far too peripheral and brief for him to be considered a representative Trotskyist of that era, or even much of a Trotskyist at all -- something which applies just as much if not more to the only other "Trotskyist neocons": Lipset, Himmelfarb, and Diamond.

#### *The question of "Shachtmanism"*

While first generation neoconservatives are accused of having been Trotskyists, second generation neocons are usually charged with Trotskyism indirectly, by virtue of supposedly having been "Shachtmanites". Those meriting this accusation are the small minority of today's neoconservatives who were members of the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation/Young People's Socialist League (SP-SDF/YPSL), and later the Social Democrats USA, in the late 1960s and early 70s. The supposed link with Trotskyism comes in the form of Max Shachtman, the leader of the 1940 split from official Trotskyism who would later go on to call the Socialist Party home and play a key role in that party's right-wing from the late 1950s to his death in 1972.



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has spent almost his entire adult life as one of proponents of democracy and capitalism. It matters journalist Daniel McCarthy, Kristol had the temerity regard myself as lucky to have been a young [9] Just as incriminating is Kristol's claim to have Trotskyist theoretical journals! But if the lack of does raise the question of exactly how much of a one takes a close look at his actual Trotskyist past, a been conjured up by the polemicists and to a certain

teens, in the milieu of the young Jewish Alcove No.1 at CCNY. While there he became a students who belonged to the youth wing of the People's Socialist League-Fourth International intellectual debating at CCNY, Kristol was not an blown Trotskyist ideologue, as is often implied by credentials. Infamously, James P. Cannon, Irish-admonished Kristol and his friend and fellow Mexico, Trotsky himself cast a wary eye on the

Shachtman occupies a fascinating place in the history of Marxism in the US for having moved, over the span of 20 years, all the way from Trotskyism to a fervently anti-communist version of social democracy. What makes this move particularly intriguing is that Shachtman carried it out while doggedly maintaining an orthodox Marxist phraseology that had increasingly little relevance to his actual politics. Since a small number of today's neoconservatives, such as Joshua Muravchik and Carl Gershman, played key roles in the Socialist Party, YPSL, and Social Democrats USA during the 1960's and 70's, there is a degree of truth to a connection between Max Shachtman and a handful of the current generation of neocons. But what has conveniently been forgotten by the paleocons amidst their frantic references to Max Shachtman's "Trotskyism" is that Shachtman broke definitively with his unique version of that ideology in the mid 1950s, even before dissolving the International Socialist League (ISL, successor to the Workers' Party) and joining the Socialist Party in 1958. Even more, abandoning Trotskyism was a *precondition* set by the SP leadership for allowing Shachtman and his followers to join their party. Once inside the party, Shachtman and the former members of the ISL carried on squarely in the tradition of the right-wing socialist "Old Guard" of the party that had split away in the 1930s: staunchly anti-Communist, closely supportive of the established trade union leaderships, orthodox Marxist in official discourse, and crucially, oriented towards working within the Democratic party -- something even the Old Guard had not been willing to advocate. The historian Robert J. Alexander, who was himself active in the Socialist Party in those years, notes that after 1958 the ideological distinctions in the party between the ex-ISL cadre and the pre-1958 socialists basically disappeared. [14] While the former Shachtmanites maintained close ties inside the SP, these ties were now based on a type of social democratic politics with deep roots in the right wing of American Socialism, rather than on a Trotskyism that had been consciously discarded. None of this history matters to paleoconservative polemicists though. In modern Old Right folklore, not only does Shachtman remain a Trotskyist beyond the late 1950s, but the Socialist Party itself is somehow transformed into a "Trotskyite" organization. Only by means of such blatant fabrications can Srdja Trifkovic, writing in the on-line version of *Chronicles*, claim that second generation neoconservatives, "...including Joshua Muravchik, and Carl Gershman, came to neoconservatism through the Socialist Party at a time when it was Trotskyite in outlook and politics." [15] In reality, the Socialist Party itself was never "Trotskyite", nor did any Trotskyists play a role inside it after their expulsion from the party in 1937. For Socialists, Trotskyism was a political *opponent* by the time that Muravchik and Penn Kemble (together with Michael Harrington) led the party and its youth wing in the late 1960's. It was not even remotely an issue by the time Carl Gershman led the successor to the right-wing of the Socialist Party following the split in 1972, the Social Democrats-USA. The very labeling of the few ex-socialist neoconservatives of today as "former Shachtmanites" is misleading, especially since the label is used to imply that they share Max Shachtman's historical connection to Trotskyism, which they do not. Justin Raimondo makes the motivation behind the label clear when he writes in Anti-War.com, that "...it was Shachtman's particular schismatic brand of Trotskyism, as advocated by the 'Yipsels,' as Comrade Muravchik and his fellow young commies called themselves, that over time was transmuted into a militant push for global 'democracy.'" [16] Raimondo's polemics on the Anti-war.com website demonstrate that he is familiar -- if perhaps excessively preoccupied -- with the history of American Trotskyism. But the conspiratorial edge to much of his writing often results in presenting a skewed history. His attempt to link neoconservatives to Shachtmanism is a confused amalgam of eras and ideologies that is way off the mark, beginning with his curious labeling of the 1960s YPSL's as both "Shachtmanites" *and* "commies" when they in fact represented a uniquely American version of right-wing social democracy. The main tenets of the actual "schismatic brand of Trotskyism" that Raimondo refers to, and that Shachtman adhered to *in the 1940s and early 50s*, were a revolutionary opposition to capitalism, a "third camp" orientation ("neither Washington nor Moscow"), the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, and support for an independent labor party in the US. It is this set of ideas that can most accurately be referred to as "Shachtmanism". [17] But not only was such Shachtmanite politics the furthest thing from the minds of Muravchik, Gershman, and the other young Socialists in the late 1960s and 70s -- none of whom was old enough to have belonged to the ISL, and for whom Shachtman was merely a charismatic anti-Communist elder statesman -- not even *Shachtman himself* still advocated those positions, having abandoned them more than a decade earlier. Commenting on the all too common tendency of labeling those on the right wing of the Socialist Party as "Shachtmanites", Muravchik, who was National Chairman of the YPSL between 1968 and 1973, has put it succinctly: "I loved Shachtman's lectures, but what I learned from them had nothing to do with the Trotskyite arcana that had once been the substance of Shachtmanism. It had everything to do with the evil nature of communism." [18] It is the inability to distinguish between right wing social democracy and revolutionary Marxism that underlies the confused allegations hurled at today's neoconservatives -- a small number of whom

were once socialists, but whose "former Shachtmanism" turns out to have even less basis in fact than the "former Trotskyism" of the first generation.

#### *"Inverted" Trotskyism*

A more sophisticated version of the "Trotskyist neocon" assertion focuses not on the pasts of individual neoconservatives but on the impact that Trotskyism has supposedly had on neoconservatism as a school of thought. This "neoconservatism-as-inverted-Trotskyism" approach is best exemplified by JP Zmyrak in his article entitled "America the Abstraction", which appeared in Pat Buchanan's *The American Conservative*, as well as in a follow up piece, "Lies, Damn Lies, and Anti-Semitism", that was posted on the website of the America's Future Foundation. Zmyrak maintains that the former Trotskyists who became Cold War anti-Communists, such as Kristol, Sidney Hook (who in fact was never a Trotskyist), and particularly James Burnham, brought with them a "... strong tendency towards pure abstraction, towards viewing national questions purely in ideological terms...." [19] According to Zmyrak this abstractionism would later become a hallmark of neoconservatism itself, and "...in some respects mirrors the Trotskyism [the neoconservatives] once held." [20]

While more sophisticated than the smears of the polemicists, this version of the assertion is perhaps even more flawed with regards to a connection between Trotskyism and neoconservatism. The "inverted" thesis has its roots at least in part in the academic works on neoconservatism that appeared in the 1990s. In particular, it can be traced back to Garry Dorrien's *The Neoconservative Mind* (1993), which Zmyrak cites in his article, and to a long book review by John B. Judis of John Ehrman's *The Rise of Neoconservatism*, entitled "Trotskyism to Anachronism: The Neoconservative Revolution" that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1995. In his book, Dorrien argues for the centrality of James Burnham, who in the 1930s was a leading intellectual and leader of the American Trotskyists, as an ideological precursor of the neoconservatives. One of Dorrien's main contentions -- which is unfortunately not developed systematically but instead sprinkled frustratingly throughout the book -- is that through Burnham and later Irving Kristol, neoconservatism retained the "...rhetorical methods..." and "... chief concepts..." of Trotskyism. [21] This is evident in Burnham and Kristol's aggressive polemics and above all in their "contempt" for liberalism, which was brought over, according to Dorrien, directly from Trotskyism. In his *Foreign Affairs* book review, Judis uses the same methodology as Dorrien with regards to the legacy of Trotskyism on neoconservative thought, and is more explicit in using the term "inverted Trotskyism". Writing specifically on the neoconservative view of foreign policy, Judis maintains that, "Neoconservatism was a kind of inverted Trotskyism, which sought to 'export democracy', in Muravchik's words, in the same way that Trotsky originally envisaged exporting socialism", and that, "... [the] neoconservatives who went through the Trotskyist and socialist movements came to see foreign policy as a crusade, the goal of which was first global socialism, then social democracy, and finally democratic capitalism. They never saw foreign policy in terms of national interest or balance of power." Behind this lay the fact that, "What both the older and younger neoconservatives absorbed from their [Trotskyist] past was an idealistic concept of internationalism." [22]

The main weakness of the Dorrien/Judis approach used by Zmyrak is, ironically, its own excessive abstractionism. The approach is based precisely on abstracting Trotskyism from the concepts that define it as a Marxist political ideology, such as the anti-capitalist class struggle and proletarian internationalism, and those that define it as a specific school within Marxism, such as the need for a Fourth International and the transitional program. As archaic and even quixotic as those principles seem, without them the term "Trotskyism" is reduced to a meaningless label. It then becomes deceptively easy to refer to anything as "inverted Trotskyism", from an aggressive polemical style and "contempt" for liberalism as argued by Dorrien, to an "idealist" concept of internationalism as argued by Judis. But what does that really say? Can such commonplace characteristics and widely held viewpoints seriously be considered in any way specific to, or constitutive of, Trotskyism as a political ideology? This approach focuses on elements that are at best *incidental* to Trotskyism, and for that reason it implies more than it can demonstrate and misleads more than it illuminates. This is even more the case when we consider that very few neoconservatives were ever Trotskyists. It perhaps goes without saying that this type of abstractionism is disastrous as an approach to history, but is tailor-made for making sensationalistic accusations.

#### *Permanent Confusion*

The final variation of the "Trotskyist neocon" assertion is the one that received much attention during the debates over the war in Iraq, and which contributed the most to the assertion's current widespread popularity. It is also perhaps the most confused. The contention here, as ludicrous as it may seem, is that neoconservatives in the US Defense Department, such as Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and former Defense Policy Board chairman Richard Perle, are surreptitiously implementing Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution from the White House. [23]

This charge is associated primarily with the liberal pundit Michael Lind, who in a much quoted article in the *New Statesman* from April of this year wrote that, "...neoconservative defence [sic] intellectuals...call their revolutionary ideology 'Wilsonianism' (after President Woodrow Wilson), but it is really Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution mingled with the far-right Likud strain of Zionism". [24] Even before Lind, however, the charge had already been made by Paris-based columnist William Pfaff, who had written in the *International Herald Tribune* in December of 2002 that, "The Bush administration's determination to deal with its problems through military means [...] seems a rightist version of Trotsky's 'permanent revolution,' destroying existing institutions and structures in the millenarian expectation that all this violence will come to an end in a better and happier world." [25] As recently as this past August, Pfaff was still insisting in the *IHT* that neoconservatives, "...are influenced by the Trotskyist version of Marxist millenarianism that was the intellectual seedbed of the neoconservative movement." [26]

Yet if anti-neocon liberals such as Lind and Pfaff -- together with an assortment of conspiracy theorists [27] -- have done the most to popularize the idea that neoconservatives adhere to the theory of permanent revolution, it is again the paleoconservatives that deserve the credit for coining the idea -- or at least some of the credit, for the actual origins are more varied than one would imagine. Paleoconservative criticism of the aggressive internationalism championed by some neoconservatives dates back to the origins of their dispute in the early 1980s. But at that time, neoconservatives were only being accused of "neo-Wilsonianism". Explicitly equating the belief in promoting a "global democratic revolution" with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution is a much more recent invention that started during the debates over how to respond to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 -- and it has some rather surprising roots.

In September of 2001, just a few weeks after the terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon, the paleoconservative author Joseph Stromberg devoted an article on the LewRockwell.com web site to attacking a piece by neoconservative scholar Michael Ledeen entitled "Creative Destruction: How to wage a revolutionary war". Ledeen's main argument was that it was "...time once again to export the democratic revolution" as the best way to defeat the terrorists. [28] Polemicizing against this view, Stromberg questioned whether Ledeen's approach stemmed from "Schumpeter or Bakunin" and decided it was neither. Stromberg then quoted a Yugoslav bureaucrat from the 1960s, Edvard Kardelj, who at the height of the Soviet-Chinese dispute sought to discredit the "Chinese line of exporting the revolution by force" by labeling it as "Trotskyite". Stromberg, who at least gives credit to Commissar Kardelj, then went on to -- incredibly -- choose that very same label to smear Ledeen and the neoconservatives. Given these methods, one should perhaps refer to the paleocons as the "inverted Titoists" of conservatism!

In reality, while Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution can be called many things, including irrelevant, it has nothing whatsoever to do with exporting revolution. Much less does it extol upheaval for its own sake or the inherent virtues of violence and destruction -- something more akin to a blend of Georges Sorel and Frantz Fanon than to Trotskyism. As defined in its final form by Trotsky in the late 1920s, the theory of permanent revolution held that in third world countries, attempts to carry out the tasks of the "bourgeois-democratic" revolution, such as land reform and "authentic" national independence, would fail unless those attempts led to the seizure of power by the working class through a socialist revolution. [29] Rather than a theory of "exporting revolution", Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution is above all a theory of the possibility of socialist revolution in the third world through combining and passing over the "historical stage" of a "bourgeois-democratic" revolution.

The claim that neoconservatives derive their view of foreign policy from an inversion of the American Trotskyists' call for permanent revolution in the 1930s and 40s is thus deeply flawed right from the start: Permanent revolution was never about using the Red Army to spread socialism. The Trotskyist movement's actual conceptual framework and political activity in the 1930s and early 40s consisted of trying to bring about world-wide revolutions "from below" as the way to break the Soviet Union out of its isolation and achieve world socialism. Calling for the Stalinist bureaucracy to export socialism by bayonet would not only have had nothing to do with permanent revolution, it would have been suicidal to boot! [30] It was, after all, that same Stalinist bureaucracy that the Trotskyists were seeking to overthrow through "political revolution" in the USSR,



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and which was itself actively strangling revolutions and annihilating Trotskyists wherever it could, from Siberia to Spain to Vietnam.


Even if one were to accept, for the purpose of example, that Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was based on an idealist internationalism that called for the military expansion of the USSR, the anti-neocons would still be mistaken in their claim that there is a single neoconservative approach to foreign policy that emerged as an inversion of this theory. One need only note that Irving Kristol, the supposed "arch-Trotskyist" according to the paleocons, has never adhered to an internationalist or "crusading" view of international relations. Kristol has instead argued for a "global unilateralism", a hybrid view based on the criteria of American national interest, something which situates him closer to foreign policy realism than to an idealist focus on "global democratic revolution". [31] As John Judis himself pointed out in an earlier, more measured article, even James Burnham, often considered a forerunner to the neoconservatives, viewed American foreign policy, "...not in terms of a Wilsonian quest for global democracy, but in terms of American national interest." [32] And Burnham was once a *leader* of the American Trotskyists.

On the other hand, Joshua Muravchik, one of today's leading neoconservative foreign policy intellectuals, who does indeed argue for a "democratic internationalism", is not now nor has he ever been a "Trotskyite", "Shachtmanite", or a supporter of any of Trotsky's theories -- least of all his theory of third world revolution. The same applies to all the other second generation neoconservatives both in and out of the White House such as Ledeen, Wolfowitz, Perle, Douglas Feith, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and former director of the CIA, James Woolsey. Beyond just a massive misreading of Trotsky, it is simply a lack of common sense to maintain that today's neoconservatives, all leading figures in the most powerful capitalist democracy in the history of the world, have been in any way influenced by a theory whose staunchest partisans have included insurgent Bolivian miners in the 1950s, Peruvian peasant militias in the 1960s, urban guerrillas in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s, and which today still has adherents among the many rabidly anti-American academics that can be found on university campuses throughout the world.

What paleoconservatives and anti-neocon liberals are really referring to when they talk about "permanent revolution" is a straw-man construct that could more accurately be labeled "perpetual war". This construct is then attributed to neoconservatives as "proof" that they have been influenced by Trotskyism. And just as this construct has no similarity to either neoconservatism *or* Trotskyism, one cannot help but notice the just as obvious lack of similarity between it and the current National Security Strategy being implemented by the Bush administration. Claims of a "perpetual war" waged by the Pentagon and of endless adventurism against all and sundry courtesy of the "War Party" stand in stark contrast to the actual course of American foreign policy since the formal end of the war in Iraq, in which diplomacy (backed by credible examples of force) has far outweighed military action.

Recognizing this fact does not entail glossing over the difficulties that the Bush administration faces -- and will continue to face if re-elected -- in the design and pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. Nor does it entail ignoring the fact that, as part of the ongoing war on terror, military force may well have to be used again in other parts of the world. What it does entail is seeing through the profoundly nonsensical notion that a desire to implement Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution is motivating US foreign policy, rather than the need for a strategic response to a radical Islamist terrorism that has already taken the lives of over 3 000 Americans and many others around the world. And given this deadly menace, what further motivation could possibly be needed?

Ultimately, regardless of what aspect of the theory one chooses to examine, there is no real substance to the "Trotskyist neocon" assertion. Whether the result of polemical excess or simply the quest for spiced-up prose, the assertion is essentially a collection of fabrications, exaggerations, and distortions. It combines the historically inaccurate with the intellectually sloppy. Lost amidst all the abstraction and distortion are the real, distinct, and -- save for a few tenuous connections -- unrelated histories of neoconservatism and American Trotskyism.

What makes all this so ironic is that it is the paleoconservatives and anti-neocon liberals themselves who not so long ago marched together with Trotskyists -- the real ones that is -- in opposition to the toppling of Saddam's dictatorship in Iraq. Even more, they have featured articles attacking US foreign policy by prominent long-time Trotskyists on the very same web sites in which they have accused neoconservatives and the Defense department of... Trotskyism! Amidst the shrillness of their accusations one thing is certain: the "Trotskyist neocon" assertion is without a doubt one of the major oddities of recent American intellectual life. 

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- 3 Dimitri K. Simes, "America's Imperial Dilemma", *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2003, p. 95.
- 4 Stephen J. Tonsor, "Why I Too Am Not A Neoconservative", *National Review*, June 20, 1986, p.55.
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- 12 Seymour Martin Lipset, "Steady Work: An Academic Memoir", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 22, 1996, pp. 1-27.
- 13 Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 71. See *Enquiry*, vols. 1-2, 1942-45, particularly the articles by Philip Selznick.
- 14 Robert Alexander, *International Trotskyism: 1929-1985* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 812-813. See also Eric Chester, *Socialists and the Ballot Box* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985), pp. 135, 146.
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- 17 A compelling case can be made that the legacy of Shachtmanism is found not in the right wing of social democracy, but in the International Socialist current that split from the SP-SDF/YPSL in the early 1960's and was led by long-time Shachtmanite Hal Draper. See Alexander, *Trotskyism*, p.899, and also Milton Fisk, *Socialism from below in the United States: The origins of the International Socialist Organization* (Cleveland: Hera Press, 1977).
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- 22 John B. Judis, "Trotskyism to Anachronism: The Neoconservative Revolution", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 1995, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19950701fareviewessay5058/john-b-judis/trotskyism-to-anachronism-the-neoconservative-revolution.html> (April 24, 2003).
- 23 Through an approach that resembles "six degrees of separation" more than historical research, it has been suggested that because Wolfowitz, Perle, and James Woolsey were influenced by military strategist Albert Wohlstetter (who was not a neoconservative) in the 1970's and 80's, and because Wohlstetter had in the 1930's belonged to a breakaway Trotskyist splinter group, that this therefore demonstrates a link between neoconservatism and Trotskyism. See Heer, "Trotsky's Ghost". For Wohlstetter, see Wald, *Intellectuals*, p. 107.
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- 25 William Pfaff, "Al Qaeda vs. the White House", *International Herald Tribune*, Dec. 28, 2002, <http://iht.com/articles/81589.html> (April 24, 2003).
- 26 William Pfaff, "The philosophers of chaos reap a whirlwind", *International Herald Tribune*, August 23, 2003, <http://www.iht.com/articles/107407.html>, (August 25, 2003).



- 27** For a cringe-inducing article on George W. Bush's supposed adherence to Trotskyism, see Ted Rall, "Permanent Revolution", *Progressive Populist*, Feb. 19, 2003, <http://www.populist.com/02.19.rall.permawar.html>, (April 24, 2003).
- 28** Joseph Stromberg, "Neocons and Total War", LewRockwell.com, Sept. 27, 2001, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/stromberg/stromberg21.html> (April 24, 2003); Michael Ledeen, "Creative Destruction", *National Review Online*, Sept. 20, 2001, <http://www.nationalreview.com/contributors/ledeen092001.shtml> (April 24, 2003).
- 29** See Leon Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution* (New York: Merit, 1969).
- 30** It is true that the Trotskyists' "dual theory" of Stalinism (opposing the bureaucracy but "defending" the nationalized economy) led them to offer post-fact justifications for the Soviet invasion of Finland in late 1939. However, offering justification for an invasion is not the same as advocating that invasion, nor does it mean that they proactively called for such invasions in general as the way to advance world revolution. It is also worth noting that the justifications were accompanied by warnings from Trotsky that such "shameful" military actions on the part of the Stalinist bureaucracy would end up harming the "degenerated workers' state". See Leon Trotsky, *Writings: 1939-40* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), pp.142-143.
- 31** See Christopher C. DeMuth (ed) *The Reagan Doctrine and Beyond* (Washington DC: AEI, 1987), pp.21-30.
- 32** John B. Judis, "Apocalypse Now and Then", *The New Republic*, August 31, 1987, p.29